

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 1494

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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR VE CO

SUBJ: VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA

1. DURING A LONG, FRIENDLY AND ENERGETIC CONVERSATION ON THE OCCASION OF HIS COURTESY CALL, THE VENEZUELA AMBASSADOR, JOSE MELICH ORSINI, REPEATEDLY OBSERVED THAT CLOSE COORDINATION AND ALLIANCE BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA WAS ESSENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF BOTH COUNTRIES AND OF THE HEMISPHERE. HIS COMMENTS IN THIS REGARD WERE SO REPETITIVE AND APPARENTLY COMPULSIVE THAT THEY MAY WELL REFLECT WHAT HE CONSIDERS HIS MISSION HERE (OR UNDERSTANDS HIS INSTRUCTIONS) TO BE.

2. IN ANY EVENT, THE POTENTIAL OF A WORKING ENTENTE CORDIALE BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA IS INTERESTING TO CONTEMPLATE. IF VENEZUELA IS, INDEED, MESSIANIC IN ITS VISION OF ITS LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE HEMISPHERE AND IN THE THIRD WORLD, IT WOULD MOST LIKELY VIEW COLOMBIA AS A HELPFUL, USEFUL AND EFFECTIVE, IF JUNIOR, PARTNER. AFTER ALL, AN EFFECTIVE CARACAS-BOGOTA AXIS COULD DOMINATE THE ANDEAN PACT, AND THIS TOGETHER WITH VENEZUELA'S CURRENT MOVES TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE INTO CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN WOULD BE A CONSIDERABLE COUNTERWEIGHT TO BRAZIL AND/OR ARGENTINA.

3. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES' FOREIGN MINISTERS

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ARE SCHEDULED TO MEET SHORTLY, AND THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES'

FINANCE MINISTERS PLUS ADVISORS ARE MEETING THIS WEEKEND IN CUCUTA. MEETINGS LIKE THIS, OF COURSE, HAVE OCCURRED BEFORE BUT IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT THEY MAY WELL HAVE MORE THAN ORDINARY SIGNIFICANCE.

4. IT IS EVEN MORE INTERESTING TO VIEW THIS HYPOTHESIS FROM THE COLOMBIAN SIDE. COLOMBIA CLEARLY NEEDS AND WILL SEEK EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS TO PROTECT ITS INTERESTS, FURTHER ITS DEVELOPMENT, AND DEAL WITH INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS AND FORCES. IF THIS NEED IS NOT FILLED BY AN EFFECTIVE AND BALANCED INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM (WHICH COLOMBIA WOULD PROBABLY DESIRE THE MOST BUT MAY WELL BELIEVE IS COLLAPSING) OR BY A FRUITFUL AND PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US (WHICH COLOMBIA SEEMS INCREASINGLY TO BELIEVE WE CANNOT OFFER), THEN IT MAY VERY WELL DECIDE THAT IT OUGHT TO RELATE ITSELF TO VENEZUELA'S NEW WEALTH AND LEADERSHIP TO PROTECT ITSELF IN THE FLUX AND INTRAHEMISPHERIC RIVALRIES THAT SEEM TO LIE AHEAD.

5. THE FRIENDLY TIES BETWEEN THE TWO CHIEFS OF STATE AND THE TWO GOVERNMENT PARTIES, AND ALL THE HISTORIC BASE OF COMMON BOLIVARIAN ORIGINS ARE, OF COURSE, OFFSET BY AN INNATE RIVALRY AND JEALOUSY BETWEEN THE TWO PEOPLES, AND SUCH THINGS AS THE CURRENT BORDER DISPUTE. THEREFORE, WHILE COLOMBIA MIGHT IN FACT AGREE TO ENTER A SPECIFIC ENTENTE RELATIONSHIP IN FOREIGN AND ECONOMIC POLICIES, IT MIGHT NOT BE A COMPLETELY WILLING PARTNER. IT JUST MAY THINK THERE IS NO OTHER SATISFACTORY ALTERNATIVE.

6. ALL OF WHICH SUGGESTS EVEN MORE INTERESTING SPECULATION FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW. WERE A PRODUCTIVE, CLOSE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US AVAILABLE, COLOMBIA MIGHT VERY WELL NOT BE TEMPTED TO ACQUIESCE IN VENEZUELAN LEADERSHIP OR PARTNERSHIP. COLOMBIA MIGHT THUS BE POTENTIALLY BOTH A BAR TO ANY VENEZUELAN TEMPTATION TO DEVELOP A CONFRONTATIONAL FORCE IN LATIN AMERICA, AS WELL AS A CREDIBLE CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION TO THE VENEZUELAN LEADERSHIP FOR MODERATING PURPOSES. IN SHORT, IF ANYONE WERE INTERESTED IN "CIVILIZING" VENEZUELA'S APPARENT CURRENT THRUST TO LEADERSHIP, COLOMBIA MAY BE HIS BEST ALLY.

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